The Early Years of AMTA and Some Notable "Firsts"

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THE FIRST MEETING

It has been 50 years since members of a post-graduate class of the College of Swedish Massage in Chicago formed the forerunner to today's AMTA, The American Association of Masseurs and Masseuses. On August 16, 1943, Dean Esther Swanson of the College of Swedish Massage, turned over an open forum and question period to Charles T. Williams of Sausalito, California, and it was during that forum that the idea of forming a professional association came up.

Reminiscing about that event some years later, Charles T. Williams, FIRST PRESIDENT of the AAMM noted:

...our pledge was outlined, and I took it to Mr. Hedenvahl (President of the College) who looked it over and made some suggestions, then had it mimeographed for us and every one of the 41 present signed and paid for their first year's dues 50¢. [The Masseur, *Jan 1950* (1)]

"We'll Get Much Farther Together"

First AAMM Motto, 1951

The first officers were Charles T. Williams (CA), President Ira Lewis (WA), Vice President; E. O. Easter (IN) Secretary; and Mrs G. Gavert (IN), Treasurer.

Some were skeptical about the potential success of forming an association of massage therapy professionals, but the early leaders forged ahead anyway;

After the meeting I had a talk with Harry McConnell who at that time was Registrar at the College [of Swedish Massage] and he told me of the efforts of others who had organized Associations and had failed. He informed me that he earnestly believed it was a waste of time and effort to put anything like this over, judging from the experience of others, but after further talks with some of the members I was convinced it was worth a trial and all the members agreed to do their utmost to put it over. [Charles T. Williams, *The Masseur*, Jan. 1950]

There were several reasons that 1943 was a good time to found a professional association for massage therapists. The field was going through a tough transition period which included the separation of physical therapists into their own field. (see Massage Therapy in the 1940s, page 56). Non-medical massage, and other forms of body-centered natural therapies were left to build their own standards, and deal with restrictive legislation and allegations of quackery. To make matters worse, non-medical massage was losing respectability, and was increasingly associated with prostitution in the public mind. There was serious work to do with the field of massage therapy in the 1940s.

THE PLEDGE

The Pledge was the cornerstone of the new Association in 1943, and appeared in its Bylaws until 1989. The Pledge served as the AMTA's FIRST CODE OF ETHICS, and set the tone of concern for standards that carries through today. Its wording changed slightly over the years to reflect changes in the field, but the basic concepts stayed the same. The

Pledge from the 1980s is compared below to an earlier Pledge from the 1940s.

I hereby pledge to do all I can to help those I am called upon to serve. [*earlier wording:...for the alleviation of pain and discomfort of all patients I am called upon to serve.*]

I will endeavor at all times to uphold the true meaning of my profession. [*no changes*]

I pledge that my office and business will conform with the teachings and standards of the AMTA. [*earlier wording:...I pledge to conform my office or business with the teachings I have received from my college.*]

I will, at all times, conduct myself and my business so that I may earn the respect and confidence of all whom I may contact. If I fail to do so, I agree that my membership shall be cancelled and certificate returned to AMTA. [*earlier wording: . . . my certificate shall be revoked and returned to the Association.*]

I will endeavor to have others in my profession, who have received credible training, live up to the principles I have heretofore set for myself. [*earlier wording:...I will endeavor to have others in my profession and in my vicinity who are graduates of an accredited college live up to the principles I have heretofore set for myself, and shall encourage them to join with our Association.*]

To all the above principles I hereby PLEDGE my word of honor [*earlier wording:...my sacred word of honor.*]

The Pledge has been replaced by the current Code of Ethics which was adopted in 1989, and appeared in the 1990 Bylaws and Membership Registry. (See "AMTA Codes and Ethics" *MTJ*, Spring 1990)

OUR PLEDGE

I hereby pledge to do all I can to help those I am called upon to serve.

I will endeavor at all times to uphold the true meaning of my profession.

I pledge to conform my office or business with the teachings and training I have received.

I will, at all times, conduct myself and my business so that I may earn the respect and confidence of all whom I may contact. If I fail to do so, I agree that my membership shall be concelled, and certificate returned to the Association.

I will endeavor to have others in my profession who have received creditable training live up to the principles I have heretofore set for myself.

To all the above principles I hereby pledge my sacred word of honor.

The AMTA pledge was its first code of ethics.

OTHER FIRSTS FROM THE '40S AND '50S

The late 1940s and early 1950s were years of formation for the Association, and many of the programs of AMTA today were initiated at that time. From 1943-45, many of the charter members were involved in the war effort, and it wasn't until after World War II that the growth of the AAMM picked up speed.

The FIRST CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS were adopted at the First Annual Convention in 1946. These Bylaws set up a Board of Directors for the governance of AAMM.

THE FIRST BOARD OF DIRECTORS elected in 1947 was made up of the three officers and one person each from the north, south, east and west of Kansas City, which was considered a central United States location. These First Board Members were Clark Cottrell (WA), President; Blanche E. Petrie (Vice-President), Charles T. Williams (CA), Secretary-Treasurer; Gerva Connor (MO); Mae Stover (AR); Archie Corey (MI): and Arthur Melson (IL).

The 1946 Bylaws also called for the formation of State Chapters.

State Chapters of the AAMM can be formed in all states where four or more active members reside, and these State Chapters shall be governed by this Constitution and shall become part of and responsible to the National Association...

The First State Chapters of record date from 1948-49 and include Arkansas, Illinois, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington. Other early Chapters include Kansas (1950), Indiana (1951), Iowa (1951), Nebraska (1951), Pennsylvania (1953), Idaho (1954), North Dakota (1954), Wisconsin (1955), California (1956), Massachusetts (1956), Missouri (1959), Montana (1959), and Rhode Island (1959). By 1991 there were Chapters in all 50 States.

The First Annual Convention of the AAMM in 1946 was held at the Hotel Continental in Kansas City, Missouri. As a side-light to a report on the first convention, Charles T. Williams noted that the Convention and Visitors Bureau was hesitant to give the group information about booking a space. The Bureau Director is reported to

have said: "the name of masseur and masseuse did not have a very good standing in K.C. and they were afraid of us." Those fears were allayed when the hotel managers met the AAMM members and sat in on one of their meetings. There were 68 AAMM members at the time, and 14 were present at the first convention.

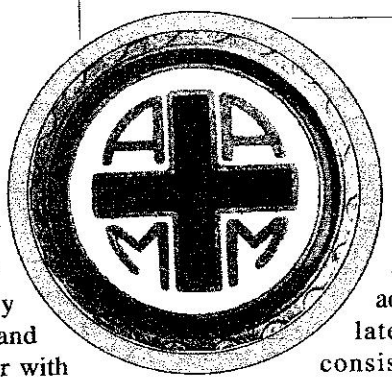
The professional interests of the first AAMM members are reflected in the 1946 educational program. As then AAMM president Clark Cottrell noted, "I am sure we are in the right track to the natural methods of healing. Let us keep faith in the great art of healing..." *The Masseur* Sept 1946.

The FIRST AAMM CONVENTION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM featured as its FIRST EDUCATIONAL SPEAKER, Eunice D. Ingham with a lecture and demonstration on Zone Therapy (reflexology). Others on the program included Harry McConnell of the Stanley Physical Therapy Equipment and Supply Company; John Granger with a lecture/demonstration of Massage and Multi-therapy; a representative of the Therm-Aire Corporation; Ira Lewis, craniopathy; and two round table discussions. There was a two day post-convention course in the Method of Modern Massage by John Granger, founder of the Multi-Therapy College.

The FIRST PUBLICATION put out by AAMM, *The Masseur*, was a mimeographed news bulletin developed in 1946 by Charles T. Williams. It featured Association news, meeting notices, opinion pieces, and short educational articles. *The Masseur* was published from 1946 to 1962, when it was succeeded by *the Massage Journal* (1962-1986). These were the forerunners to today's publications, *Massage Therapy Journal* and *Hands-On*.

Sixth Annual Banquet of the AAMM, Continenal Hotel, Kansas City, Missouri, 1951.

Original AAMM logo



The FIRST LOGO for the Association was adopted in the late 1940s and consisted of a monogram with the association initials AAMM separated by a cross and enclosed in a circle. The logo was used in the First Public Relations Efforts of the AAMM. It was reported that the "massage parlor problem" in Spokane, Washington in 1949 resulted in the designing of the AAMM emblem for office display to identify legitimate massage therapists. The AAMM logo was available as a decal for office windows, and in the form of stamps. (*The Massage Journal,* Winter 1976-77).

Over the years, a total of five different designs were used to symbolize the association. (See "Historian's Report" *MTJ* Winter 1987). The design of the shield first used in 1958 has the same familiar elements used in subsequent AMTA shield logos through 1993.

The emblem was designed...in a response to a request on the part of our membership for one that embodied the heart and hands as they combine in the activities of not only the AMTA — but also in the the life of the individual massage therapist.

The white of the emblem represents the purity of our hearts, our ideals and our aims. The hands uphold the torch of wisdom and understanding. The flame indicates the burning desire to be of service to others. The shield is a sign of strength and integrity as the AMTA moves forward, a perpetual force for greater victory in achieving our goals—helping mankind. [*The Massage Journal, Sept 1963*]

One of the FIRST KNOWN MEMBERSHIP BOOKLETS from the late 1940s or early 1950s described the AAMM of that time as a "non-profit Association dedicated toward improving the lot of all Ethical

★ THE MASSEUR ★

American Association Masseurs Masseuses

OFFICIAL BULLETIN **NOVEMBER 1954** DECATUR, ILLINOIS

Malpractice Insurance Available For

AAMM official publication masthead.

Masseurs and Masseuses. The Association also has the objective of improving the services our profession renders humanity." In outlining its accomplishments, the booklet lists organizing chapters on a nationwide bases, higher professional standards, higher earnings, legislative protection, public relations, improved relationships with the medical profession, insurance, and educational literature. By 1952, membership had grown to 272.

Official lists of members from the earliest years of AMTA are hard to find. In 1954, State Chapters and their members were listed in the Annual Convention Program The First Official Yearbook and Registry was published in 1955.

Professional Standards

Schools

By the mid-1950s, there was a School and Colleges Committee which developed some general standards for recognition of schools. At that time, only graduates of approved schools were eligible for AAMM membership. Ruth Williams of Washington, Education Director and later President in the mid-1950s, was instrumental in setting up this FIRST SCHOOL APPROVAL PROGRAM in 1954. The criteria for school recognition included that a pretest be given students to determine their aptitude for the work; that students have at least a high school diploma; a minimum three month resident course (changed to six in 1955); that a final examination be given; and that a diploma, not a certificate, be issued to graduates.
(*The Masseur*, Nov 1954)

A. A. M. M.

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU

We'll Get Much Farther Together

American Association of Masseurs & Masseuses

Early membership booklet, late 1940s or early 1950s.

At first, school approval was used solely as a tool for determining those eligible for Active Membership in AAMM, i.e., as a means of establishing membership standards. Over the years, alternative avenues to Active Membership opened up (e.g. membership entrance examination, certain state licenses and National Certification), and membership standards became a separate issue from school standards. Today's AMTA Commission on Massage Training Accreditation/Approval (COMTAA), successor to the old School Approval Program, is instrumental in setting standards of education and training for the profession as a whole.

Credentials

The next story might come under the heading of "missed opportunities." A little known piece of AMTA history from the late 1940s involves an effort by Milton Niedfelt, AAMM member from Seattle (WA), to initiate a National Board of Examiners for Masseurs. This was the First Proposal Within AAMM to Create a National Credential for Massage Therapists. The purpose of the proposed national examination was to determine entry level competence in massage therapy.

It seems that there was quite a political struggle over the idea of a National Examination. Leading the opposition was former AAMM President Charles T. Williams who responded to the idea with the following: "of all the asinine proposals I have ever heard of this one takes the cake." He called it a "hairbrained idea" which if adopted would make AAMM "the laughing stock of all the professions." *(from letter Oct 1949 Williams)*

Paul Wendell, a Naturopathic Physician from New York, tried to explain the benefits of a National Board Examination to Mr Williams, but to no avail. Wendell said that the examination would show the "home folks" that a practitioner is "competent and qualified to practice massage," that it would be recognized in every state and build up prestige. He further recommended that the National Board of Examiners be incorporated in Washington D.C. or in California. *(from letter Oct 1949 Wendell)*

The National Examiners Board was not adopted at that time, but curiously, many of Niedfelt's and Wendell's ideas were found later in the AMTA Membership Entrance Examination and other membership requirements, and the Registered Massage Therapist (RMT) Examination initiated in 1968. These elements included that candidates must have graduated from a recognized massage school, be of good moral character, never have been convicted of a crime, not be addicted to

AMTA "Firsts" From the Early Years

1943

1st meeting: August 16, 1943 at the College of Swedish Massage in Chicago
1st name: American Association of Masseurs and Masseuses
1st Officers: Charles T. Williams (CA), President; Ira Lewis (WA), Vice-President; E.O. Easter (IN), Secretary; Mrs. G. Gavert (IN), Treasurer
1st Code of Ethics: The Pledge
1st Dues: 50 cents

1946

1st Annual Convention: Kansas City, MO
1st Constitution and Bylaws
1st Board of Directors: Clark Cottrel (WA), President; Blanche E. Petrie, Vice-President; Charles T. Williams (CA), Secretary-Treasurer; Gerva Connor (MO); Mae Stover (AR); Archie Corey (MI); Arthur Melson (IL).
1st Educational Presentation: Eunice D. Ingham on Zone Therapy (Reflexology)
1st Publication: The Masseur, a mimeographed news bulletin

Late 1940s

1st Logo: the AAMM Monogram
1st Membership Recruitment Booklet

1949

1st State Chapters: Arkansas, Illinois, Oregon, Virginia, Washington
1st Proposal to Develop a National Examination
1st Legislative Program - the "Massage Registration Act"

Early 1950s

1st Motto: "We'll Get Farther Together"

1954

1st School Approval Program
1st Member Recognition Program - Registered Massage Therapist (RMT)
1st Policy Toward Other Health Care Professionals

1955

1st Yearbook and Membership Registry

drugs or "inebriety," be recommended by two masseurs or masseuses who already had passed the National Board Examination, and submit a photograph upon application. *(from letter Oct 1949 Wendell)*

In fact the examination suggested by Wendell closely resembled an early RMT Examination. There were short essay questions which included:

- *Define massage.*
- *Name four classes of movements.*
- *How is each performed?*
- *Give psychological effects of massage.*
- *Give six contraindications for massage.*
- *Is it advisable to give massage after eating?*
- *How should parts be kept warm during massage?*

(from letter 1949 Wendell)

The Registered Massage Therapist Program was in operation from 1954 to 1991, and began simply as a recognition for AAMM members who remained in good standing for three consecutive years. It was the FIRST IN-HOUSE RECOGNITION PROGRAM for AAMM Members. Fourteen years later, in 1968, when James Bowling (TN) was Director of Education and Tom Fink (PA) was President, an examination was added. The RMT Examination started out as an entry level examination, and for many who had not attended regular schooling in the profession, acted as a testament to their having achieved entry level competency. (In 1968, it was not required that AMTA Active Members have graduated from an Approved School.)

Only much later did the RMT acquire status as an advanced examination. (see Honoring the Past —Serving the Future *MTJ* Winter 1992). Although only available to AMTA members, the RMT had the aura of a national credential since AMTA was a national association. The RMT program served the membership well until its retirement in 1991.

In 1988, the AMTA National Board recognized that the time had finally come for the kind of national examination that Milton Niedfelt had proposed in 1949. This decision led to the inauguration of the exam in June 1992. This is the FIRST NATIONAL CREDENTIAL FOR THERAPEUTIC MASSAGE AND BODYWORK PROFESSIONALS which meets accepted standards for such credentials in the health-related fields. The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork is currently officially recognized in AMTA Bylaws as an administratively independent affiliate.

Declaration of Independence

As mentioned before, the 1940s and 1950s were a period of self-definition for those massage professionals who chose not to be grandfathered in under the newly created physical therapy licensing laws. Three major reasons for not aligning with the medical establishment were the desire to continue using natural methods of healing and possibly work with non-allopatric healers, the choice to work in non-medical massage settings such as health clubs, and the desire to practice independently, i.e., not strictly under a doctor's supervision.

In 1954, the AAMM passed a resolution called the Statement of Policy of the AAMM, which strongly declared their independence. It is the FIRST KNOWN RESOLUTION DEFINING AAMM POLICY TOWARD OTHER HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS. The resolution read:

It is the purpose and aim of the AAMM and its members to work with,

and cooperate with, all other healing professions amicably, but to be subservient to none.

The AAMM and its members recognize its own limitations, but by the same token, is fully aware of its wide field of usefulness in relation to most bodily infirmities.

The AAMM and its members will recognize and respect all ethical practitioners, and will comply with and follow prescriptions sent with referred cases, unless otherwise arranged or modified with the consent of both parties.

The AAMM and its members reserve the right to accept patients for treatment without prescriptions, within the full scope of its possibilities, not conflicting with state laws. [Adopted August 1954]

This Statement of Policy appeared in the annual Yearbook (Registry) from 1954 to 1965 as a resolution, and then until the 1980s as part of a code of ethics. The issues that this resolution was created to address are relevant today as massage therapists attempt to establish closer ties with the health care field. This period of our history would be worth revisiting in greater detail to glean whatever lessons we can for today's situation.

Protecting the Right to Practice

A membership brochure from the early 1950s lists "legislative protection" as an important member benefit.

"The Association has continuously fought for the legalization of massage as a branch of the healing arts through the Legislative Branches of the State Governments and several state laws have been passed with more to come.

"It has continuously fought off and nullified vicious legislation which would have degraded the massage profession, and which would have brought chaos to organized Massage as a profession.

"In fighting for just and equitable legislation the Association has therefore protected the earnings of the individual Masseur and Masseuse in the community."

One of the First Legislative Efforts was to develop a model law called the "Massage Registration Act" which was discussed at the 1949 Convention in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and adopted at the 1950 Convention in Chicago. Charles T. Williams described the model law as follows:

This "Act" when adopted by all States not now having licensing Laws, will make it mandatory for all Practitioners of Massage [to] be of good health and graduates of an accredited School or College of Massage, and provides for strict inspection of all Massage establishments. This "Act" is now law in Arkansas... [1952]

State licensing of massage practitioners was then seen as the solution to the many problems faced in those years, and was adopted as the AAMM's chief legislation program at that time. AMTA's legislative efforts now are guided by the Government Relations Committee. Today's legislative policy allows for more variation in approaches, and supports local and state initiatives rather than having one national policy. (See "A Proposed Policy Statement" in *In Touch with the Future,* AMTA 1990; and "Delegates Approve First Policy Statement", *Hands-On* Winter 1990.)

Final Thoughts

In the early years, several of today's AMTA programs were initiated, and some basic values were imprinted. Still evident today are the commitment to natural methods of healing, professionalism and high standards, and the right to practice independently. The 1960s through 1993 also brought significant development to the AMTA, and that story will be told at another time. There have been and will be many more "firsts" in AMTA history, as we continue to meet the challenges of the day.

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FINAL THOUGHTS

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Today, on this 50th Anniversary, we look back to the very beginning. My how we've changed — and haven't changed— in 50 years! ■

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Notes

1. Another account by Charles T. Williams made in 1952 reports that "out of 41 members in the class, 29 signed and paid the first years dues of 50 ¢." from the Milton Niedfelt Papers, University of Washington, Seattle.

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